

THE GROUNDING OBJECTION REVISITED: A CRITIQUE OF MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE

by Steven B. Cowan

That God has what is called “middle knowledge” (MK) is a position developed by Luis de Molina, a 16th-century theologian, in order to provide a solution to the classic philosophical problems associated with God's providence and foreknowledge.¹ This solution, if successful, is supposed to provide the Christian with a strong view of God's sovereignty over creation while at the same time preserving the belief that human beings have indeterministic or libertarian freedom.

How does MK accomplish this grand solution? Advocates of MK, called *Molinists*, distinguish between three aspects or kinds of knowledge possessed by God. First, God is said to have *natural knowledge*, through which, by virtue of his nature, he knows all necessary truths such as the laws of logic, the existence of numbers, logical possibilities, etc. Second, God knows all of the contingent truths that have come about as the result of his free decisions, such as which of all the possible worlds he could have created is actual, that the Allies landed in Normandy in 1944, and that Washington, D.C. is the capital of the United States. God's knowledge of such truths is called *free knowledge*.

In addition to natural and free knowledge, Molinists claim that God possesses a form of knowledge logically midway between the former two. This *middle knowledge* is God's knowledge of the courses of action which would be taken by free creatures in any possible circumstance. That is, MK is God's knowledge of the truth-values of what are popularly known as *counterfactuals of freedom* (CFs).² God knows (and has always known), for example, the truth-value of the counterfactual proposition:

¹ See Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (Cornell University Press, 1988).

² The term "counterfactual" is somewhat misleading here, since many of the CFs God is said to know are those in which the antecedent and/or consequent are true. Hence, they are not necessarily *counterfactual*. This has led many philosophers to prefer designations like "deliberative conditionals" or "subjunctives of freedom." However, I will continue to use the more popular "counterfactuals of freedom."

(A) If David had remained in Keilah, then Saul would have besieged the city.

Of course, as the biblical story goes (1 Sam. 23:1-14), David did not remain in Keilah and Saul did not besiege the city. Nevertheless, God has known from all eternity, even before David and Saul existed—even before creation itself—that if David had stayed in Keilah under the circumstances that prevailed in his life, Saul would most certainly have besieged the city. And of course, God is supposed to know this, according to the Molinist, even if Saul has free will in the libertarian sense. In fact, we are to suppose that Saul does have free will, for (A) is said to be a counterfactual of *freedom*.

If God can and does know propositions like (A), then it seems that we have a very impressive theory for reconciling divine sovereignty and human freedom. As William Lane Craig has said, “Since God knows what any free creature would do in any situation, he can, by creating the appropriate situations, bring it about that creatures will achieve his ends and purposes and that they will do so freely.”³ David Basinger elaborates:

A God with MK knew *before* creation what would in fact eventuate, given every option open to him. . . . But the fact that he knew *before* creation what would eventuate given any creative option does, of course, mean that no gambling was involved in the creative process. He did not have to worry about any surprises; he knew no second guessing would be necessary. For he had the ability to consider all the actualizable worlds and choose the one which best mirrored his creative options.⁴

Since God knows which CFs are true in every possible world (in virtue of his middle knowledge), he is able to control the course of history by actualizing that possible world where free creatures, in the circumstances made actual by God's creative decision, do those things that God wants them to do. Of course, as Basinger and others point out, God has no control over which CFs are true in a given possible world. So God cannot actualize just any possible world he might desire to actualize. His options are limited by what each free creature would in fact (freely) do in any given circumstance.

Nevertheless, once God decides to actualize a particular actualizable world, MK guarantees that the history of the actual world will unfold as God intends, even in the minutest detail. God thus has very strong control over his creation without endangering human freedom or responsibility.

Such is the MK solution to the problem of divine providence and human freedom. However, there is a standard objection to MK that many philosophers find persuasive. This objection is called the *grounding objection* (GO). In the remainder of this paper, I will explain the grounding objection and defend it against the major rejoinders that proponents of MK have made.

³ William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 135.

⁴ David Basinger, "Middle Knowledge and Classical Christian Thought," *Religious Studies* 22 (1986): 412 (italics his).

The Grounding Objection

The basic idea behind GO is the contention that God cannot have MK because the counterfactuals of freedom which are the objects of God's MK have no truth value. That is, there are no actual states of affairs to which such propositions could correspond in order to make them true or false. There is, as Robert Adams has argued, no *ground* for the truth of a CF. Using the example of David and Saul, mentioned above, Adams explains:

I do not understand what it would be for any [CF relevant to the example] to be true, given that the actions in question would have been free, and that David did not stay in Keilah. . . For there never was nor will be an actual besieging of Keilah by Saul. . . to which those propositions might correspond.⁵

William Hasker puts it this way: "In order for a (contingent) conditional state of affairs to obtain, its obtaining must be grounded in some categorical state of affairs. More colloquially, truths about 'what *would be the case*. . .if' must be grounded in truths about what *is in fact* the case."⁶ Since CFs have no such grounds, they have no truth-value. And if they have no truth-value, then God cannot possibly know them because no one, not even God, can know something that isn't true. And, of course, this means that God cannot have MK.

Molinists, of course, have offered responses to the GO. Sometimes these responses take the form of simply "holding the GO at bay," arguing that the GO is not decisive. That is, even though the Molinist may not be able to explain how CFs are grounded, the GO does not present a problem serious enough for the Molinist to reject his intuitions regarding their truth-value. Thomas Flint seems to make this point when he says that

the "grounding" objection is far from the conclusive refutation of Molinism it is sometimes made out to be. Given that the cost for the libertarian of rejecting Molinism is the demolition of the traditional notion of providence, the "grounding" objection gives the orthodox Christian insufficient incentive to pay so high a price.⁷

At other times, advocates of MK have attempted to provide an account for the grounding of CFs.⁸ These responses are, of course, more serious, and will be the subject of much of what follows in my defense of the GO. Suffice it to say for now that I do not find these attempts to ground CFs very plausible. More than that, however, I do think that the GO provides the Molinist with a problem sufficient to call into doubt his commitment to the truth of CFs. Not all Anti-Molinists would seem to agree with me, though. For in the wake of the Molinist responses to the

⁵ Robert M. Adams, "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14:2 (April 1977): 109-17.

⁶ William H. Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Cornell University Press, 1989), 30.

⁷ Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Cornell University Press, 1998), 137.

⁸ See, Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 178-179; Alfred J. Freddoso, "Introduction" to Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (Cornell University Press, 1988, 70-74; William Lane Craig, "Hasker On Divine Knowledge" *Philosophical Studies* 67 (August 1992): 89-110; *The Only Wise God*, 140-41.

GO, rather than press the defense of the GO, many critics of MK have sought to provide other, more sophisticated and complex attacks on MK.⁹ I am not denying that these new anti-molinist arguments are useful. In fact, I find many of them quite persuasive. Moreover, as Thomas Flint recognizes, some of these new arguments are “clever variations on the 'grounding' objection.”¹⁰ Nevertheless, I believe that it is not necessary to formulate new anti-molinist arguments in order to defeat Molinism. The “generic grounding objection” that I have outlined above will do just fine. This generic version of the grounding objection may be formulated as part of a straightforward argument against MK, the *Generic Grounding Objection Argument* (GGOA), which may be stated as follows:

- (1) Given any set of antecedent circumstances *C*, *S* is free in *C* with respect to an action *x* if and only if *S* is not determined to do *x* in *C*.
- (2) Let *S* be free in *C* with respect to some action *x*. (Assumption)
- (3) *S* is not determined to do either *x* or $\sim x$ in *C*. (From 1 & 2)
- (4) If *S* is not determined to do *x* or $\sim x$ in *C*, then there is no fact of the matter to what *S* would do in *C*. (Grounding Objection)
- (5) If there is no fact of the matter to what *S* would do in *C*, then no CF in which *S* is the subject has a truth-value. (Grounding Objection)
- (6) If *S* is not determined to do *x* or $\sim x$ in *C*, then no CF in which *S* is the subject has a truth-value. (From 3 & 6, Modus Ponens)
- (7) No CF in which *S* is the subject has a truth-value. (From 3 & 6, Modus Ponens)
- (8) If no CF in which *S* is the subject has a truth-value, then God cannot know any such CF.
- (9) Therefore, God cannot know any such CF. (From 7 & 8, Modus Ponens)

The conclusion (9) is tantamount to denying that God has MK. Premises (1), (5), and (8) are unobjectionable. The key premise of the argument is (4). This premise is an assertion of the grounding objection, and is the one that the Molinist will want to reject.

My contention, in defense of (4), is that the very fact that *S*'s actions are undetermined (i.e., that *S* has libertarian freedom) vitiates any alleged CF (where *S* is the subject) of any truth value. For, if *S* is free to do *x* or refrain from *x* in *C*, there simply is no fact of the matter to what *S* would do. Notice that I am not claiming that there is no fact of the matter to what *S* actually does or will do (if *S* is actualized by God), but only that any claim as to what *S* would (counterfactually) do is neither true nor false. There is nothing about *S*, nor about *C*, nor about *x*, which would or could make it true that *S* does (for example) *x* in *C*.

So, on the assumption that he has libertarian freedom, it is an open question as to whether Saul would besiege Keilah if David remained in the city. We cannot say what Saul would do. Not even Saul can say for sure what he would do. He might *intend* to besiege Keilah if David remains, but intentions can change and persons can act out of character. He might (even probably) besiege Keilah, given what we know of his character, but this does not imply that he *would* besiege Keilah. Given this, not even an omniscient being can know what Saul would do, for there is simply nothing to know. There is just no telling what Saul would do! The truth value of any and every CF, then, is undeterminate. And since they are undeterminate, God cannot know

⁹ See Robert M. Adams, “An Anti-Molinist Argument” *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 343-53; William Hasker, “A Refutation of Middle Knowledge” *Nous* 20 (December 1986): 545-557; “Middle Knowledge: A Refutation Revisited” *Faith and Philosophy* 12:2 (April 1995): 223-36; “A New Anti-Molinist Argument,” *Religious Studies* 35 (1999): 291-97; “Anti-Molinism Is Undefeated!” *Faith and Philosophy* 17:1 (January 2000): 126-31; and Timothy O’CONNOR, “The Impossibility of Middle Knowledge,” *Philosophical Studies* 66 (May 1992): 139-66.

¹⁰ Flint, *Divine Providence*, 123.

them. This is the generic grounding objection. And this objection, I contend, provides a powerful refutation of MK. I will attempt to justify this claim in what follows.

Responses to the Grounding Objection

Molinists have not sat still in the face of the GO, as I indicated earlier. Many of them have offered responses to the grounding objection which they believe show that it is not very powerful after all, and certainly not conclusive.¹¹ In this section I will evaluate some of the more serious of these responses.

The Analogy with Future-Tense Statements

Some Molinists have responded to the grounding objection by arguing that the objection is analogous to arguments purporting to show that future-tense statements have no truth value. In other words, to argue that

(A) If David had remained in Keilah, then Saul would have besieged the city

has no truth-value, is to make the same mistake as those who contend that categorical propositions about the future such as

(B) Jesus will return bodily in 2010

have no truth value. Now most of us believe that (B) has a definite truth value. It is either true or it is false (probably false). And some very good arguments can be given to show that propositions like (B) do in fact have truth-value. But, the defenders of MK might say, if (A) has no truth-value, then neither does (B). William Lane Craig explains:

This argument [the grounding objection] seems to rest on the same misconception of truth as correspondence that we considered earlier. . . There we saw that at the time of the truth of future-tense statements, the reality to which they corresponded is nonexistent. All that the view of truth as correspondence requires of future-tense statements is that the realities described *will* exist. Similarly, at the time at which counterfactual statements are true, it is not required that the circumstances or actions referred to actually exist. The view of truth as correspondence requires only that such actions *would* be taken if the specified circumstances *were* to exist.¹²

Likewise, Thomas Flint, following the lead of Alfred Freddoso, says that the grounding objection to CFs

¹¹ E.g., Craig, *The Only Wise God*; "Hasker On Divine Knowledge" *Philosophical Studies* 67 (August 1992): 89-110; "Robert Adam's New Anti-Molinist Argument," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 54:4 (December 1994): 857-61; On Hasker's Defense of Anti-Molinism," *Faith and Philosophy* 15:2 (April 1998): 236-40. Another well-known defender of MK is Thomas Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Cornell University Press, 1998).

¹² Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 139-41.

seems very reminiscent of—indeed, all but inseparable from—the type of argument characteristically forwarded by antirealists concerning absolute future contingent truths. Consider a proposition such as

(2) Albert Gore will freely decide to run for president in 2000. [The state of affairs referred to in this proposition was future when Flint wrote it.]

Those who deny that propositions such as (2) can be true generally defend their antirealism by pointing out that such propositions lack sufficient metaphysical grounds. Nothing that Gore is doing here and now, and nothing about his present character, entail that (2) is true.¹³

The Anti-molinist can reply to this argument in one of three ways. First, he might simply bite the bullet and say, “Well, so much the worse for future-tense contingent statements.” This would be, I suppose, the response given by Open Theists, who reject not only MK, but also God’s foreknowledge of his creatures’ future free acts. Second, the Anti-Molinist might be a compatibilist, agreeing that arguments against CFs and those against future-tense contingent statements do parallel one another, *if one assumes that libertarianism is true*. But, if libertarianism is false, then future-tense contingents will be grounded by the characters of human agents which *determine* what they will do in the future. Thus a future-tense statement such as Flint’s (2) above would be grounded by Gore’s *present* character. CFs, on the other hand, will still be ungrounded because they presuppose, by definition, the truth of libertarianism.¹⁴

The simpler response, however, is to say that it is all very well and good that CFs would correspond to reality if the actions they refer to “*would be taken if the specified circumstances were to exist,*” but it is precisely the question at issue as to whether in fact such actions *would be taken*. The grounding objection just is the view that there simply is no fact to the matter as to what an agent with libertarian freedom *would do* in a given hypothetical (or even actual) circumstance. That is, the problem that the grounding objection is raising is not simply that the antecedent and consequent of a statement like “If David had remained in Keilah, then Saul would have besieged the city” refer to states of affairs that do not exist (which is the alleged problem with future-tense propositions). Rather the problem revolves around the nature of agents who have libertarian freedom. It is because MK requires that God know counterfactuals of *freedom*—counterfactual statements about what free agents would (hypothetically) do in a given circumstance—that gives rise to the grounding objection.

Another way of putting this is to say that the parallel between antirealism about CFs and antirealism about future-tense contingents is only superficial. When the antirealist about future-tense contingents says that such propositions lack sufficient metaphysical grounding, then Craig’s reply is perfectly adequate: “In order for . . . future-tense statements to be true [i.e., grounded], all

13 Flint, *Divine Providence*, 129.

14 For what it’s worth, this is the solution that I favor. I think that libertarianism is false, and that agent’s always act on the basis of their desires, so that what grounds their future actions is quite literally *present states of affairs*.

that is required is that when the moment described arrives, the present-tense version of the statement will be true.”¹⁵ This is analogous to what we might say about past-tense statements. The past-tense statement

(C) George W. Bush won the 2000 Presidential election

is grounded not in some present, existent state of affairs, but in a past state of affairs which at the time of its occurrence was present. So, (C) is true just in case the present-tense counterpart

(D) George W. Bush wins the 2000 Presidential election

was in fact true. Likewise, the future-tense statement (B) above is true just in case the present-tense statement

(E) Jesus returns in 2010

is true in 2010—that is, just in case Jesus returns in 2010.¹⁶

But, the problem with grounding CFs is not so simple. It is, in fact, quite a different problem. Take, once again, our paradigm CF,

(A) If David had remained in Keilah, then Saul would have besieged the city.

With this CF, unlike our future contingent above, there is no state affairs, past present, or future to which we can point in order to ground the CF. That is, there is no time, past, present, or future, in which a present-tense version of (A) corresponds to an actual, present state of affairs.¹⁷ And it will not do to reply, as Craig has, that a “statement of the form ‘if *P* were placed in *c*, then *P* would do *x*’ is true if and only if *P* would do *x* if *P* were placed in *c*.”¹⁸ Why not? Because whether or not *P* would do *x* in *c* is precisely the question at issue! Of course such a statement would be true if *P* would do *x* in *c*! But, *would P* do *x* in *c*? The GO is the claim that such a

15 Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 57.

16 I take it that the more formal account given by Flint (Divine Providence, 130-134) is tantamount to the same Craig's.

17 The Molinist may respond to this point by asking about a situation in the actual world in which the antecedent of a CF is true and the agent performs the action in question. For example, suppose we want to know if the CF “If I were rich, I would buy a Mercedes” is grounded. And let us suppose that through some fortuitous turn of events I do become rich (say) by winning the lottery. And suppose that when I become rich, I do in fact buy a Mercedes. Well, asks the Molinist, wouldn't this show that the CF in question is grounded? Not at all. All that this story would ground is “If I am rich, I buy a Mercedes,” and it does so simply because of the obtaining of the categorical state of affairs of *my buying a Mercedes*. In any case, even if this CF were grounded in this way, it would be of no help to God in deciding which world to create for the CFs that God needs to know for MK to work cannot involve actual decisions in the actual (post-creation) world.

18 Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 141

question (given that P has libertarian freedom) admits of no answer. Simply asserting that there is an answer does not refute the grounding objection, but only begs the question against it.¹⁹

The Appeal to Possible World Semantics

Another way in which Molinists have attempted to provide a ground for CFs is to appeal to possible world semantic regarding counterfactuals. On the standard account, a counterfactual proposition is true if and only if, in the possible world(s) nearest the actual world in which the antecedent is true, the consequent is also true. So, for example,

(A) If David had remained in Keilah, then Saul would have besieged the city

is true if and only if, in the possible world nearest the actual world in which David remained in Keilah, it is also true that Saul besieged the city. So, a CF like (A) can be grounded if there is a possible world in which both the antecedent and consequent of (A) are true that is closer to the actual world than a possible world in which the antecedent is true and the consequent is false.

However, there is a problem facing the Molinist at this point. There are certainly possible worlds in which David stays in Keilah and Saul besieges the city, but there are also possible worlds in which David stays in Keilah and Saul does not besiege the city. Which of these possible worlds are closer to the actual world? On the standard analysis, the “distances” between possible worlds is measured by their overall similarities and differences. But, it is easy to imagine two possible worlds, W_1 and W_2 , that are exactly the same up to a time t in which David makes the decision to remain in Keilah, which differ subsequent to t in that in W_1 Saul besieges the city, and in W_2 Saul does not besiege the city. Again, which one is closer to the actual world? At first glance, it would seem that neither is closer.

Thomas Flint, however, has attempted to solve the problem in favor of MK. Describing the grounding objection, Flint says that

a counterfactual such as ($c _ z$) is grounded only if z would be grounded if c were true—in other words, only if, in the nearest world in which the agent in question is in c , she grounds z —say, by performing action Z . But if the agent is truly free, then aren't there worlds in which she is in c and *refrains* from performing Z that are just as close to our world as any world in which she is in c and *performs* Z ? If a Z -less world is just as close

¹⁹ Of course, William Lane Craig has argued the opposite point, namely, that the demand for a ground for such propositions as (A) begs the question against libertarianism, or, to put it in his words, “The demand for a ground for volitional counterfactual states of affairs seems misguided. It implicitly presupposes that libertarianism and agent causation are false doctrines” (Craig, “Hasker On Divine Knowledge,” 100). But this is not the case. What the Anti-Molinist is doing is simply pointing out the *implications* of libertarianism for the truth-value of counterfactuals which refer to the actions of libertarianly free agents. It is one thing to say that “Jones freely chooses x .” We can easily imagine that such a proposition about a free agent is grounded in the categorical state of affairs of *Jones freely choosing* x . But, it is another matter entirely to say that the conditional “If Jones were in c , he would freely choose x ” is grounded. Craig says it is grounded in the counterfactual state of affairs it describes. But what state of affairs is that? It is precisely the question at issue as to whether or not there is such a state of affairs.

to the actual world as is a Z-ful one, then the claim that z would be grounded if she were in c is false. . .²⁰

In response to this grounding objection, Flint then appeals to Plantinga's view that the similarity of possible worlds is partly determined by the counterfactuals they share. Therefore, says Flint, "the Z-ful world may well be the more similar to the actual world due to the fact that, both in it and the actual world, $(c _ z)$ is true, whereas the same counterfactual is false in the relevant Z-less world."²¹

Flint's response to the grounding objection seems, however, to be an obvious case of circular reasoning. William Hasker has commented on Flint's argument:

This passage would seem to admit of paraphrase as follows: The counterfactual $(c _ z)$ is true in the actual world because z is true in the world nearest the actual world in which c is true, and that world *is* nearest to the actual world because it shares with the actual world the counterfactual $(c _ z)$! But this appears to be an unusually clear case of circular explanation. . .²²

In fairness to Flint, though, he does anticipate Hasker's response. He says the charge of circularity here is once again reminiscent of the attack on future-tense statements. He writes:

Suppose the antirealist [about future-tense statement] were to point out that (2), the claim that Gore will freely run for president, cannot now be grounded because there are possible futures (call them Goreful ones) in which "Gore freely runs" is true and other possible futures (call them Goreless ones) in which "Gore freely runs" is false, and there is no reason to view either type of future as privileged with respect to (or, as we might be tempted to say, as more similar to) the world as it is here and now. The natural realist response, I take it, would be to say that the two types of possible futures are *not* equal, for only one is part of the actual world. But won't such a response be rejected by the antirealist, whose whole point is that there is no such thing as *the* actual, fully determinate world? Won't he ask what it is about the world *here and now* which grounds the claim that the Goreful future will come to be? In reply, the realist, I think, would have to grant that the Goreful future may not have any privileged status over the Goreless ones if only fundamentally non-future propositions are allowed into consideration. However, if fundamentally future propositions (such as the temporally indexed "Gore runs for president in 2000," or the simpler "Gore runs for president") are acknowledged as truth about the way things are here and now, it follows that the privileged status of the Goreful futures can indeed be defended. But, of course, to the antirealist, assuming there to *be* such truths here and now is sure to seem unsatisfying, question-begging, perhaps even amusing. . .²³

20 Flint, *Divine Providence*, 135.

21 Ibid., 135-36.

22 William Hasker, Review of Flint's *Divine Providence* in *Faith and Philosophy* 16:2 (April 1999):248-253.

23 Flint, *Divine Providence*, 136-137.

My reply here is much the same as before. The similarity between the antirealist regarding future-tense contingent statements and the antirealist regarding CFs is purely superficial. The truth-value of a future-tense statement such as

(B) Jesus will return in 2010

is grounded here and now because, assuming that it is true, there will obtain, in 2010, the categorical state of affairs *Jesus returns in 2010*. But no such state of affairs has obtained, does obtain, or ever will obtain regarding any CF. Certainly, no such categorical states of affairs were available to God before he created the actual world, which is something required by MK. I must, then, concur with Hasker's assessment that since "comparative similarity among possible worlds does *not* provide the grounding for the truth of the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, then we have been given no answer whatever to the grounding objection."²⁴

²⁴ Hasker, Review of Flint's *Divine Providence*, 251. Timothy O'CONNER, echoing the thought of Alfred Freddoso, has offered another account for the grounding of CFs that deserves some mention (See "The Impossibility of Middle Knowledge," 154-158). The account amounts to this: Suppose there is a free agent *S* in some possible world *W* which has a particular causal history up to some time *t*. At *t*, *S* is faced with a situation calling for a free choice. What choice would *S* make? O'CONNER states,

While it is true that there are many *possible* worlds sharing this description which diverge at *t*, there can only be one concrete world, with but one of any set of mutually exclusive states of affairs obtaining at a given time. So if God had actualized this sort of universe, one---but only one---of these courses of action would have been undertaken. Which one?---Who knows? . . .but it surely cannot be denied that something would have occurred (p.157).

The point is that even though we might not *know* what an agent would freely do in a counterfactual situation, there is no doubt that he would do *something*. So far so good. But O'CONNER goes on to say,

Consider now the universe God did in fact create. And consider the first free choice of some agent *A* at *t*. There are possible worlds identical in their causal history up to time *t* which diverge at *t*, due to the different choices available to *A*, but only one of these alternatives was actually taken. (Ibid.).

The upshot of these remarks is to claim that a CF such as "If Jones were in *C*, then he would do *x*" is true in virtue of the fact that (1) Jones must make *some* choice, and (2) there is a state of affairs at some time *t* such that Jones does *x*. Of course, it is clear where the problem lies. It simply does not follow from the fact that Jones does *x* at some future time and that he must make some choice with regard to *x* that the subjunctive conditional "If Jones were in *C*, he would do *x* is true." All that follows is "If Jones were in *C*, he *will* do *x*. That little word "would" in the subjunctive makes all the difference in the world. Even if the future conditional about what Jones *will* do is true, this does nothing to show that the subjunctive future conditional about what Jones *would* (freely) do is true. Moreover, as O'CONNER himself admits, this scenario involves the *actual* world and Jones' *actual* choice. The CF involved in this case is one in which both the antecedent and the consequent actually obtain. O'CONNER himself is not persuaded that this account can be extended to cover CFs that are genuinely counterfactual and involve future events (as must be the case if the MK solution is to work).

The Brute Fact “Argument”

Having been unable perhaps to offer an account of the grounding of CFs, the Molinist has one more strategy, namely, to assert that CFs are simply brute facts. Maybe the proponent of MK hasn't shown *how* CFs are grounded, but this doesn't prove that CFs have no truth-value. It is intuitively plausible, they say, to maintain that there are indeed true CFs and that God knows them. The burden of proof is on the Anti-Molinist to show why MK is incoherent or otherwise problematic despite their having no definitive explanation for the grounding of CFs. In other words, the MK proponent may argue that CFs are, as far as we know, brute facts about the universe. Why not? The Anti-Molinist hasn't show that they *can't* be brute facts. So, what prevents the Molinist from simply believing in the reality of CFs in any case?

I suppose that nothing would prevent the Molinist from making this move. But, it would seem to me that this move would be an attempt to get something for nothing. Or, to get something *out of nothing*. It reminds me a lot of those critics of the cosmological argument who, in attempting to avoid the conclusion of the argument, deny the causal principle and ask why the (contingent) universe cannot simply be a brute fact. The defender of the cosmological argument can give no logically necessary reason in refutation of this desperate move, but he reminds the critic that the causal principle holds in other areas of inquiry, and clearly the causal principle is more plausible than its denial.

Likewise, the Anti-Molinist may reply to the “Brute Fact Argument” by reminding the Molinist that the correspondence theory of truth's requirement that propositions be grounded is met by other types of propositions. And since there is apparently no ground for CFs, this means that premise (4) of the GGOA is more plausible than its denial.

The Grounding Objection Triumphant

We have seen that attempt to ground the truth-value of CFs is problematic at best. No plausible account for their grounding has (yet) been found. I have doubts that one will ever be found. The reason I think this is because I believe that the GO does more than simply make CFs mysterious. It gives us positive reason to think that they are in fact ungrounded, and that their truth-value is undeterminate.

Let me explain it this way. Take the conditional proposition

(F) If the moon is made of green cheese, then Alvin Plantinga is an android.

Now both the antecedent and the consequent of this conditional are false (I'm sure that Alvin Plantinga will be glad to here that!). But as you know, on truth-functional logic, this proposition is supposed to be true! Clearly, however, something has gone amiss. If such a proposition were to appear as a premise in an argument, we would all surely dismiss it as obviously fallacious. Why? Because, in ordinary discourse, when we assert a conditional proposition, we believe that there is some connection, (say) logical or

causal, between the antecedent and the consequent. And, of course, there is no connection, no *relevance*, between the antecedent and the consequent of (F).

Now take the counterfactual conditional—not the counterfactual of freedom, but the counterfactual *simpliciter*:

(G) If I were to offer my wife the choice between liver and onions or ice cream, then she would choose ice cream.

I believe, and I think I know, that (G) is true. I might even say to you, “If you knew my wife, then *you* would know that she would choose ice cream in this situation.” Yet notice the antecedent of this last sentence very carefully: “If you *knew my wife...*” What am I saying? Am I not saying that if you knew, like I know, my wife's character, her beliefs, her desires, habits, etc., then you would know what she would choose?

Why do we think that counterfactual conditionals like (G) have truth-value, and that we can and do know them? Isn't it because we think (or assume) that there is a connection, probably a causal connection, between the antecedent and the consequent? I think so.

But now let us suppose that my wife has libertarian freedom. Let us suppose that, given any set of antecedent circumstances, such as my offering her the choice of liver and onions or ice cream, she is free in that circumstance to choose one or the other, to choose ice cream or refrain from ice cream. It seems to me that once we make this assumption, once we interject libertarianism into the situation, things *have* to change. They have to change because the connection we might otherwise assume between the antecedent and the consequent has been severed. What grounded the truth of (G) without this assumption, namely, my wife's character, can no longer serve that function. Assuming that the agents who are the subjects of counterfactuals have libertarian freedom obliterates any connection, any relevance between the antecedent and the consequent of those propositions. And if there is no such connection, then it seems that CFs are analogous to proposition (F): “If the moon is made of green cheese, then Alvin Plantinga is an android.” If we think that the latter is absurd and ought not to be accepted as true, if we think, in other words, that (F) is ungrounded, then we ought to think that CFs are ungrounded as well.

The real culprit here, then—the basis of the GO—is libertarianism, or perhaps more generally, indeterminism. As Peter Van Inwagen has said, the GO “depends on no other features of free acts other than the fact that they are undetermined (a consequence of incompatibilism).”²⁵ Now it is not my intent in this paper to critique indeterminism. It is my point here only that indeterminism has *implications*—implications for counterfactuals concerning free creatures that God is alleged to know prior to his creative decision, and

²⁵ Peter Van Inwagen, “Against Middle Knowledge.” This is an unpublished paper which can found at www.soci.niu.edu/phildept/speakers/VanInwagen_AgainstMiddleKnowledge.html.

for the ordinary counterfactuals in the actual world that you and I think we know, and which we use to guide us in our everyday lives.

In conclusion, if what I have said is on the mark, then CFs are ungrounded. And if they are ungrounded, then they have no truth-value, and premise (4) of the GGOA is true. Which means that God does not have MK.